



Michigan National Organization for Women

Post Office Box 860
East Lansing, Michigan 48826
(517) 485-9687
www.michnow.org

May 13, 2009

Honorable Mark Meadows, Chair
House Judiciary Committee
Anderson House Office Building
Lansing, MI

Dear Representative Meadows and Members of the House Judiciary Committee;

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on **House Bills 4835 and 4836** which would prohibit bias-motivated crimes and provide sentencing guidelines.

First, I want to thank Representatives Jones of Kalamazoo and Representative Stanley of Flint for taking the lead on sponsoring these bills that would expand the ethnic intimidation act in Michigan to more categories of common victims of status-based crimes, and increase the penalties if the underlying criminal act is motivated by bias towards those with the covered characteristics. Importantly, the act defines hanging a noose or burning a cross without the permission of the property owner as a violation of the act.

The current ethnic intimidation act only covers race, color, religion, gender, or national origin. Expansion of the act to disability, gender identity (or expression of gender), ancestry, color, ethnicity, sexual orientation, veteran status, or association with any of the covered categories will help, in the long run, to deter crimes motivated on these bases.

We also believe that the penalty scheme linking the crime motivation to enhanced and variable penalties, increasing the penalty by 50% in some cases, is a way to emphasize that bias-motivation for crimes is more harmful to society than the crime committed without the tainted motivation.

By passing these bills, this legislature can send a strong message to the public that bias-motivated conduct is undesirable in our state and action will be taken if the bias-motivated conduct rises to the level of an underlying criminal act.

Michigan NOW thanks you for the opportunity to comment on these important bills and urges their quick passage.

The National Organization for Women is the largest activist feminist organization in the United States with hundreds of chapters nationwide.

Sincerely,

Mary Pollock
Legislative Vice-President